

Regional and general meetings before the creation of bicameral parliament

Piotrków being located in the centre of Poland at the cross of the main districts: the Greater Poland, the Lesser Poland, and Mazovia was one of the main reasons deciding the rich past of the town as the place of all nobility meetings and synods from the entire Polish Kingdom. Since the first mention about



Constitution of the Sejm in Piotrków – 1565

It is worth mentioning that the land of Piotrków was a direct witness of the restitution of the Polish Kingdom by the hands of Władysław the Short. In neighbour town of Sulejów, during the meeting of noblemen in June 1318, a petition to pope John XXII asking permission to crown Władysław the King of Poland was legislated. With the agreement on Rome's part, the coronation happened in 1320 in Cracow.

King Casimir the Great also had the meaning of Piotrków in mind. Until 20th century, it was believed that it was in Piotrków where in 1347 Piotrków-Wiślica Statutes were issued. Modern day historians reject this statement; however: at least once during the reign of Casimir the Great, Piotrków was the place of a big magnates meeting - in February 1346. In the times of Władysław II Jagiełło, Piotrków ended up in the middle of events shaping the birth of the Polish parliament. Most importantly, during the meeting of knights and nobility from 28th February to 1st April 1388, he issued a document reconfirming the privileges for magnates, nobility and clergy altogether. Similar united meetings happened probably in 1398 and 1399.

The beginning of the 15th century marks not only one of the greatest fires in the history of the town, during which the first location documents were destroyed, but also one of the most interesting knights convents in Piotrków. In 1406 and 1407 two confederations were organized here; the second one is known as in conventione generali, which meant it pretended to represent the entire Poland. Both conspiracies (in the

resolution of 1406 there is a telling phrase litterae conspirationis – the documents of conspiracy). Both confederations were created during conflicts between nobility and clergy in the matter of competence of ecclesiastical courts and tithe.

When exactly the bicameral parliament came to being in Piotrków?

Surprisingly, the answer to this question is not simple and unambiguous. As the knowledge about history increases, the new theories are being created.

The first meeting with the title of parlamentum generale happened in 1438. Władysław III (later known as Władysław of Varna), attaining age of majority on the same year, confirmed every previous privilege of nobility. The confederation of 1446, formed to state death of the king Władysław III and proclaim the need to elect the next king, was also called general. Many more meetings in Piotrków in the times of Casimir IV Jagiellon: 1451, 1455, 1456, 1457, 1458, 1459, 1460, 1462 and 1466 were defined conventio generalis. Parlamentum generale was used again to define the meeting in 1453, when King Casimir reconfirmed all noble privileges.

However, these meetings were mostly consisting of royal council, clerks, and representatives of nobility, townspeople and cathedral chapters. The last groups were de facto only observers and did not have direct contribution to meetings.

According to the latest research of professor Wacław Uruszczak, the first Polish bicameral parliament should be considered the one started on 9th October 1468 in Piotrków. It also means several modern historians reject the year 1493 as the supposed start of parliament in Poland. They refer to chroniclers like Jan Długosz, Marcin Bielski and Marcin Kromer, who mentioned that on October 1468 not only the king and senators, but also deputies chosen by the nobility on sejmiks (regional meetings) came to Piotrków. They did not approve the main postulate of the king – hiring additional mercenaries. However, during the Sejm in 1468 they discussed the ideas such as coin falsification, courts



In the times of Sigismund I and Sigismund Augustus, the meetings of the Sejm took place in the Royal Castle

competence and demand to apply the same law in the entire country.

It is worth mentioning that professor Wacław Uruszczak was not the first researcher who pushed the year 1468 as the date of the first bicameral parliament. Similar thesis was made already in the 19th century by people like Joachim Lelewel, Władysław Bentkowski, Józef Szujki or Władysław Łebiński.

Regardless of which date we consider valid – 1468 or 1493, both Sejms took place in Piotrków. There is an interesting legend involved with the latter. It is said that King John Albert initially chose the town of Radomsko as the place of the Sejm. However, the deputies awaiting for the king realised that there are not enough taverns and rooms in the town of Saint Lambert, and the quality of local beverages did not meet the expectations of the noblemen. Because of that, they decided to move to Piotrków, which was much more prepared for so many visitors, and wait for the king there. When the king was travelling towards Radomsko, he entered Piotrków and realised that everybody is waiting him there, so he decided to move the meeting to our town. Possibly because he was forced to make this decision, he did not let the deputies in to the main hall, where he was talking with the magnates. The deputies decided to have a separate meeting, and they do as such to this day...

The first elections of Polish Kings

According to a popular opinion, the first free royal elections happened in Warsaw in the second half of the 16th century, and the ones in Piotrków in the 15th century were restricted only to the Jagiellonian dynasty. It is not entirely true, which can be proven by the very first of them – 1445 - 1446. It was then when the fate of the crown for Casimir Jagiellon was being weighed in the balance in Piotrków. He was the Grand Duke of Lithuania back then and refused to claim the Polish throne because of the supposed unclear death of his brother, Władysław of Varna. During the election of 1446, among the candidates were Frederick II of Brandenburg and two dukes of Mazowsze – Władysław and Bolesław. The latter was even legally elected. This election however was just a way to push Casimir to accept his duty. Casimir Jagiellon was finally elected Polish King in 1447 in Piotrków.

Another election in Piotrków happened in August 1492. The candidates were: John Albert, Grand Duke of Lithuania Alexander, Sigismund (later called Old), as well as the duke of Mazowsze Janusz II, who was patronised by the Primate of Poland Zbigniew Oleśnicki. When Janusz came to Piotrków with thousand knights, the Jagiellons responded by sending their reinforcements from Kraków to Fryderyk, another son of Casimir Jagiellon and the bishop of Kraków, as well as the intervention of Alexander, who send emissaries to the dukes

of Mazowsze, informing about his full support of John Albert. With both diplomacy and a threat of force, John Albert was elected King on 27th August 1492.

The election of Alexander Jagiellon was considerably more peaceful. It lead to signing the Union of Mielnik in October 1501 in Piotrków. Thus some historians call the act the Union of Piotrków-Mielnik. Among the provisions, which gave birth



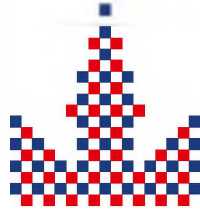
The Sejm meetings used to start with a holy mass in the Saint Jacob's parish church (Fara)

to the famous Union of Lublin half a century later, were for example common election, bilateral military help and one monetary system. It was declared that the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Lithuanian Duchy shall become one state.

Mentioned earlier as a candidate for the throne, Sigismund the Old was elected Polish King no sooner than in 1506. The meeting started with the holy mass in the Saint Jacob's church, during which the attendees prayed to the Holy Spirit so they can correctly choose the next king. The meeting was then moved to the king's residence beyond the town

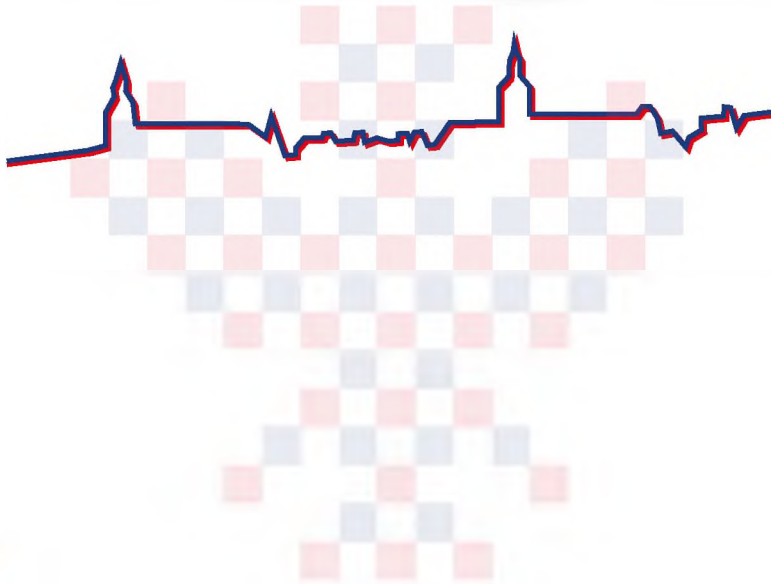
borders. Although there was not a single serious candidate except Sigismund, to keep the tradition, the talking about the best possible future king had to start. Because the discussion was not heated, the proper election started already on 8th December, under the lead of the archbishop Primate Andrzej Róża Borzyszkowski. After the act of election of Sigismund, there was a voting which proved to be unanimously in his favour. Then the marshal went from the senators' room to the entrance of the residence and proclaimed the result of the election to the noblemen. He asked them three times if they agree with the result. After the confirmation, everybody moved to the parish church where they song a solemn Te Deum Laudamus.

The last election in Piotrków happened during the Sejm in December 1529. Sigismund I the Old and his wife Bona Sforza convinced the magnates and noblemen to elect his son Sigismund Augustus next Polish King. It was the first and only election vivente rege (with the previous king still alive) in our history. It was concluded with the celebratory coronation of Sigismund Augustus in 1530 in Wawel in Kraków.



Piotrków Trybunalski

The Parliamentary Piotrków



Prussian Homages of the Teutonic Knights

During the Sejm (lower house of Parliament) meetings in Piotrków, there were many events of international scale – Poland was one of the greatest empires of Europe at the time, so it was not unusual for the king to be visited by emissaries from other countries like Hungary or Czechs in our town. One of the most important events in the history of the town was the first Prussian Homage. After the Second Peace of Thorn in 1466, Grand Masters of the Teutonic Knights were obliged to pay homage to every consecutive Polish King.

The first such act happened on 1st December 1469 during the Sejm meeting in Piotrków, where Grand Master Heinrich Reuß von Plauen paid homage to King Casimir IV Jagiellon. The leader of the Order came to Piotrków with two knights: Weit von Gich, the Komtur (Commander) of Brandenburg, and Marcin von Gebrattel Komn. They were greeted near the town walls by voivodes (province governors) with the company of 200 horsemen. The formal greeting happened in front of the Sieradzka gate. The group then moved through the town to the king's castle, where the Teutonic dignitaries were inaugurated by the bishop of Poznań Jędrzej Opaliński and the bishop of Chełm Wincenty Gosławski. The Grand Master had to kneel before the king and swear an oath of allegiance to the Polish Kingdom on the Holy Bible, which was held by bishop of Kraków Jan Lutkowic. Then he stood up and was kissed by the Polish King, who lead him to the royal council as one of dukes of the Kingdom.

The homage was not without conflicts. Part of the nobility with chancellor Jan Gruszczyński as the face accused the Teutonic Knights of secret parley with the Pope. Von Plauen vividly declined the accusations in a speech, evoking his honesty and honour.

What followed the homage was also very unpleasant. When



Alexander Jagiellon with officials of the Kingdom and its fiefs

the Grand Master was returning from Piotrków, he had a stroke and became partially paralysed. He died on 2nd January 1470 in Morąg. Some contemporary chroniclers suggested that his heart “broke” when he had to kneel before the Polish King as the first Teutonic Knight in history.

Almost a year after this event, Piotrków was the place of yet another tribute. Grand Master Heinrich Reffle von Richtenberg paid homage to King Casimir IV. This time the Grand Master brought 700 Teutonic Knights with him. He was greeted by the Sieradzka gate by the starosta (local governor) of Poznań with 300 horsemen. Firstly, there was a celebratory banquet sponsored by the King for the Grand Master. The homage itself happened on 29th November 1470. The Grand Master paid it accompanied by aforementioned chancellor Gruszczyński, the archbishop of Gniezno and the Primate of Poland, who hold the Blessed Sacrament in one hand and a crucifix in the other. The archbishop recited the words of the oath in German; they were translated to Polish by the bishop of Przemyśl Andrzej Oporowski.

The third homage in the history of Piotrków was supposed to happen in 1479. Unfortunately, the people waiting for Grand Master Martin Truchseß von Wetzhausen were waiting in vain. The homage finally happened in Nowy Korczyn.

Selected convents, meetings and Sejms of the Crown of the Kingdom of Poland which happened in Piotrków Trybunalski (based on the information collected by the Museum in Piotrków)

11th March 1347 – the supposed great meeting organized by king Casimir III the Great which was to write down the rights of Greater Poland. Although modern day historians reject the possibility of so-called Statutes of Piotrków to be enacted on this meeting, at least one of them happened in Piotrków in this period of time (possibly in July 1346).

28th February 1388 – Władysław II Jagiełło confirms the privileges of Casimir the Great, Louis I of Hungary and his own, for the magnates, nobility and clergy altogether, inscriptio domini regis atque terrigenis regni, which means with both the magnates and the nobility present.

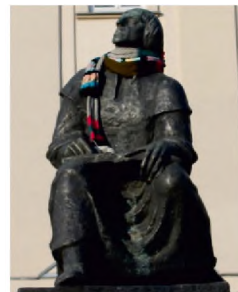
8th December 1438 – general Sejm meeting, for the first time called parlamentum generale in the official documents. Delegates of the most important towns of Poland, including Piotrków, took part in this meeting as observers.

3rd May 1467 – a delegation from the Teutonic Order with Grand Master Heinrich Reuß von Plauen came to Piotrków because of the ratification of the Second Peace of Thorn, which ended the Thirteen Years' War.

9th – 31st October 1468 – the first general bicameral parliament in Piotrków, with the king, senators and deputies taking part in.

28th January 1493 – King John I Albert confirmed the privileges of the clergy and nobility.

13th March – 2nd May 1496 – Sejm meeting started by King John I Albert. Set of laws called the Statutes of Piotrków were enacted there.



MIKOŁAJ KOPERNIK
1473 - 1543

Among the famous individuals visiting Sejms in Piotrków were people like: Nicolaus Copernicus, Mikołaj Rej, Stanisław Orzechowski and Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski

26th January 1501 – on the general Sejm Grand Master Frederick of Saxony was forced to swear an oath to the Polish King.

14th September 1501 – start of an election Sejm, during which the deputies from Grand Duchy of Lithuania were presented with a new act of union, composed of 15 articles. It proclaimed the full unity of the two states: Poland and Lithuania. Common election of the one monarch was also adopted. On 5th October Grand Duke of Lithuania Alexander, brother of John I Albert, was elected Polish King.

21st January – 13th - March 1504 – the Sejm decided that the king cannot freely distribute the Crown lands.

Magnates were forbidden to hold two administrative positions (Incompatibilitas), the Privilege of Mielnik (1501) which expanded the power of the Senate at the expense of the king was also rejected. Additionally the king was forced to reclaim the Crown lands which were illegally claimed by magnates.

8th December 1506 – an election Sejm unanimously elected Sigismund I King of Poland.

9th February 1519 – the general Sejm in Piotrków was visited by the emissaries from Prussia, complaining on the Teutonic Order. War with the Order was passed, unless the Grand Master fulfils his duties concerning the king. The building of king's residence in Piotrków was officially finished.

24th October 1523 - during a Sejm meeting in Piotrków, Nicolaus Copernicus was asked by the king to mouth his “Treatise on Money”. He formulated a theory that debased coinage drives un-debased coinage out of circulation.

18th December 1529 – with the agreement of all of the deputies and senators, 10 years old Sigismund II Augustus was elected Polish King (with his father Sigismund I still alive).

31st October 1548 – the Sejm declined Sigismund Augustus

his marriage with Barbara Radziwiłł. The king did not listen to the deputies and went through with his marriage.

22nd April 1555 – the Protestant nobility demanded creation of the Polish national state church, independent of the Pope. These were the times when, despite the official ban, Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski's De Republica emendanda (On the Improvement of Commonwealth), condemned on the synod in Piotrków (1551) by cardinal Stanislaus Hosius, was being sold in the town. The idea ultimately failed.

30th November 1562 – a so called executorial Sejm started in Piotrków. It was passed that magnates have to give back the Crown lands which were illegally claimed, there were also many reforms of the courts and finances, as well as the military. The executorial Sejm finished on 25th March 1563.

15th April 1567 – the last Sejm in Piotrków. On 14th June King Sigismund Augustus issued an Universal which was a legal executive act of the constitution of the last Sejm. It regulated the circulation of foreign coins in the Polish Kingdom.

The celebration of the 500th anniversary of the forming of the Polish parliament on the general meeting in Piotrków 1493 – 1993

In January 1993, according to the contemporary knowledge of history tracing back the beginning of bicameral parliament to the January of 1493, the official inauguration of the celebration of the 500th anniversary of the Polish parliament happened in Piotrków. The preparation for the celebration was in the hands of the foundation funded in 1991 by Tadeusz Nowakowski, a populariser of the history of Piotrków and longstanding president of PTTK branch in Piotrków. Marshal of the Sejm Wiesław Chrzanowski fostered the celebration. The main day, 28th January 1993, started in accordance to the tradition from 500 years ago – the Holy Mass in the St. Jacob's parish church. The mass was said by the archbishop of the Archdiocese of Łódź Władysław Ziółek. Both the Marshal of the Sejm Wiesław Chrzanowski and the Marshal of the Senate August Chełkowski took part in it. After the celebration, a commemorative plaque was placed on the obelisk in front of the Royal Castle.

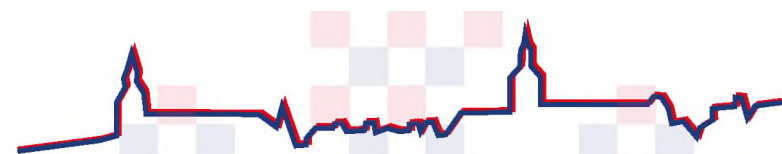


Our Trybunalska Lady – the patroness of Polish parliament (Society of Jesus monastery)



Jax-Bykowski's Castle – one of the residences hosting the magnates (including Queen Bona) during Sejms

Grafi: Andrzej Hoffman. Malarstwo i zdjęcie: OT. Muzeum w Piotrkowie Trybunalskim. Archiwum Państwowe w Piotrkowie Trybunalskim. Tłumaczenie: Dominik Wódek



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